



EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: BRIDGING THE GAP THROUGH INCLUSIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

It is education which is the prime tool to equip every child to meet the challenges of life. The goal of education for children with or without special needs is to prepare them for a happy, productive & useful civil life. In order to accomplish this goal, the fundamental intent of RTE Act 2009 is to ensure that elementary education reaches all children irrespective of caste, creed, religion, colour, and disability. Even The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 also advocates education of CWSN in appropriate environment till they attain the age of 18 years And Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, also states that, as far as possible, CWSN should be placed in regular schools, with needed support services in the form of inclusive education which means education of all students, where all students are equal participants in the learning process. Through this paper an attempt is made to highlight the role of Inclusive Education in educating the children with special need (CWSN) and how it serves as a boon in bridging the gap, what are the challenges in implementing inclusive education and suggestions for successful implementation of the inclusive education.

KEY WORDS: RTE, CWSN, Inclusive Education.

INTRODUCTION:

It is beyond doubt that across the world many children do not receive adequate education including large number who have disabled. Education is the right of children, able-bodied or disabled. It is education which is the prime tool to equip a child to meet the challenges of life. The goal of education for children with or without special needs is to prepare them for a happy, productive & useful civil life.

Globally, the status of inclusive education varies from country to country. In this context it seems to be most advanced in Italy and Scandinavia. Whereas some countries have effective legislation to ensure mainstreaming, others have adopted different methods in meeting the country's specific needs.

Inclusive education is an ideology & not a programme. It is a concept of effective schools where every child has a place to study and teachers become facilitators of learning rather than providers of information. All children are special in one way or another. A teacher in the classroom is confronted with the job of identifying these needs to assess their precise nature and to provide learning experiences accordingly. The philosophy of Inclusive Education rests on giving equal opportunities to an integrated group of able-bodied and differently-abled children studying together. Inclusion "Refers to the opportunities for persons with disability to participate fully in all the educational, employment, consumer, recreational, community and domestic activities that typify every society."

Ideology of Inclusive Education:

Inclusive education differs from previously held notions of 'integration' and 'mainstreaming', which tended to be concerned principally with disability and 'special educational needs' and implied learners changing or becoming 'ready for' accommodation by the mainstream. By contrast, inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept. It is about ...

- Rejecting segregation or exclusion of learners for whatever reason – ability, gender, language, care status, family income, disability, sexuality, colour, religion or ethnic origin;
- Maximizing the participation of all learners in the community schools of their choice;
- Making learning more meaningful and relevant for all, particularly those learners most vulnerable to exclusionary pressures;
- Rethinking and restructuring policies, curricula, cultures and practices in schools and learning environments so that diverse learning needs can be met, whatever the origin or nature of those needs. Inclusion is about school change to improve the educational system for all students. It means changes in the curriculum, changes in how teachers teach and how students learn, as well as changes in how students with and without special needs interact with and relate to one another.

In other words, it is open to all students, and that ensure that all students learn and participate. For this to happen, teachers, schools and systems may need to change so that they can better accommodate the diversity of needs that pupils have and that they are included in all aspects of school-life. It also means identifying any

barriers within and around the school that hinder learning and participation, and reducing or removing these barriers. Inclusive education is a process of enabling all students, including previously excluded groups, to learn and participate effectively within mainstream school systems. Placing excluded students within a mainstream setting does not of itself achieve inclusion.

Inclusive Education is Based on Following Principles:

- Every student has an inherent right to education on basis of equality of opportunity.
- No student is excluded from, or discriminated within education on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, disability, birth, poverty or other status.
- All students can learn and benefit from education.
- Schools adapt to the needs of students, rather than students adapting to the needs of the school.
- The student's views are listened to and taken seriously.
- Individual differences between students are a source of richness and diversity, and not a problem.
- The diversity of needs and pace of development of students are addressed through a wide and flexible range of responses.

Components of Inclusive Education:

- Equal opportunities
- Effective educational services.
- Needed supplementary assistive devices.
- Support services.
- Age-appropriate classes.
- Neighborhood school.
- Parent's involvement.

Benefits:

Inclusive education is claimed by its advocates to have many benefits for the students like:

- Students learn to appreciate each other's unique strengths and abilities.
- Students are encouraged to help each other.
- Students are encouraged to help each other.
- Students with disabilities are able to foster friendship in natural manner

and in a natural environment.

- Non – Disabled students get a chance to develop positive attitudes towards people with difference.
- Self –esteem and a feeling of achievement comes automatically.
- Students often learn desirable social behaviors best from each other, in a typical environment.

Major Challenges in the Implementation of Inclusive Education in India Following challenges are faced while implementing Inclusive education:

- The ground reality is that India is far from achieving inclusive education even though it has committed to Education for All. Much needs to be done pragmatically – not just talking about it. Currently, most of the inclusive education work is done by NGOs with not much support from the Government. Policy makers and structures have very little idea about needs of disabled people and are not in touch with ground realities.
- It is very difficult to attract well-qualified professionals to give their input and generate ideas about inclusive education due to current salary structures.
- Availability of textbooks – only 33 per cent of students in special schools have books in Braille or other accessible formats.
- Lack of trained teachers - Teachers must be trained to teach children across all disabilities. Currently there are not enough well trained teachers for every school and the system does not accept teachers trained in special education in mainstream schools. In-service teachers need some training in dealing with disabled children. Principals must be willing to let teachers have time off to train and the special education teachers should be allowed to teach in mainstream schools while they are doing so. Persons qualified in special education are qualified only in certain impairments. They also need time off to get training for children across disabilities. The national teaching training course needs to be extended in content and time in order to teach inclusivity as standard.
- Lack of disabled friendly schools.
- Current inclusive education initiatives tend to look at inclusive education in a piecemeal way but the country needs a systemic change.
- People's attitudes which are reinforced through practice – if segregated education continues and experienced by the majority of children, then non-disabled children, and tomorrow's policy-makers, will continue to think that this is the way to provide education. There is a need to also create more sensitivity in society as a whole to disability issues and to raise the awareness of parents of disabled children about their rights and potential – currently, many parents, if they have 4 children, 1 of whom is disabled, will focus on sending the other 3 to school and not worry about getting the disabled child into school.
- Current education system centred on academic achievement – there is a need for a different kind of 'examination' system.
- Lack of early identification and early intervention.
- Indian Disability Act 1995 reserves 3% seats in every state school for students with a disability. Some participants felt that this limits the number of children with disabilities allowed into schools but others felt that this protection was needed to ensure that students would be admitted. There was agreement that every disabled child should have the right to access state schools.

SUGGESTIONS:

- Remove the barriers and provide suitable classroom environment in order to make disabled friendly schools.
- There is a need to sensitize parents, peers and regular teachers for developing positive attitude towards children with disabilities.
- Involve parents and teachers in the planning committee.
- Spreading awareness to the policy makers with regard to the needs of person with disabilities.
- Involvement of planners with practical knowledge for proper utilization of funds and resources.
- Assessment of the budget should be transparent..
- Concerned NGO will have sitting with government officials for planning need based programmes for the welfare of the person with disabilities.
- There is a dire need to develop more teaching learning material in the form of

programme learning material and computer assisted instruction for better learning.

- Recruitment of special educators as a permanent teacher on regular basis in regular school with full pay scale for continuous service.
- Sensitize general school teachers to implement inclusive education.
- Day care and early intervention centres should be increased to promote more and better services
- Formation of a body for monitoring and follow up of inclusive education practice.

CONCLUSION:

Inclusion of children with special needs is essentially the responsibility of the regular education system. Yet, special education professionals, parents of children with special needs as well as parents of non-disabled peer groups, students without disabilities and the community as a whole have to be empowered for inclusive education to be successful. Further, there is a need for barrier free environment and suitable transport to reach school. Above all, sensitization of administrators, adaptations in curriculum, evaluation procedures and teacher preparation to enhance their competence in teaching children with special needs, are imperative for effective inclusion of children with special needs. There is a need for special education and general education to merge. Planning and management of education for children with special needs should aim at bringing about such a change in the educational system.

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